RESEARCH ON THE ACTIOTOPE MODEL OF GIFTEDNESS: A DISCUSSION[1]

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Introduction

This symposium's heading is "Research on the Actiotope Model of Giftedness". It is now my undertaking to summarize and find a conclusion of the three convincing papers held on this symposium. I'd like to start with some words about the Actiotope model itself and how it is anchored in the field of modelling giftedness.

Theoretical models of giftedness

In literature about giftedness and education of the gifted numerous approaches are found concerning how to model the theoretical construct of giftedness of which some are contradictory to each other. The supposably most comprehensive overview can be found in the "conceptions of giftedness" by Sternberg and Davidson (2005[2]). This book features 24 contributions regarding the question how to conceptualize the construct of "giftedness". Interestingly, most of the approaches to model giftedness were proposed between the late seventieth and the end of the eightieth.

Taking a closer look at recent developments of these different theoretical conceptualizations, it seems evident that all of these approaches converge in the point that the *goal* of development is to lead potential into performance and that *environment* is not only one but maybe the strongest influencing variable on the way to becoming an expert.

Accordingly, in newer time in literature about giftedness and talent a *decrease* in controversies can be observed in terms of what giftedness is and how it is to be conceptualised – even though contradictory models still exist side by side. Albert Ziegler described this situation in 2004 with the following words: "Which conception of giftedness one tends to favour is a question of taste, not a question of the thorough consideration of empirical findings". On the other hand, an *increase* in discussions about how to promote talents in their development to expertise can be remarked. Maybe this is the implementation of what Albert Ziegler called a "demand for a conceptual reboot."

Most of these proposed strategies for counselling and promoting the gifted and talented *do* refer to a theoretical model of giftedness. Nevertheless these strategies are generally of limited coverage. A theoretical underpinning is deficient that allows deducing strategies in *all* questions concerning the promotion of the gifted, as also pointed out by Robert Grassinger in the previous contribution.

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The Actiotope Model of Giftedness

In this context, the Actiotope Model of Giftedness concludes the up to date currents in modelling giftedness: It is a prime and first example for the proposed “conceptual reboot”, and fills the gap of theoretical modelling concerning the counselling of talents. To the best of my knowledge, it was first published in 2004.

In the previous contributions Alfred Ziegler as well as Robert Grassinger already presented the Actiotope Model of Giftedness, so I will not repeat this once again in detail. I will merely highlight in brief some of the central ideas:

The main focus of the Actiotope model is on the *paths* to excellence and the elements and conditions which interact to pave the way. The widely spread concept of giftedness as a personal attribute is given up; the main emphasis is no longer on the differences between persons. The main focus *now* is on the *conditions* which lead to that one is apparently able or not able to *realize* an effective action. Concurrently, a large number of influencing variables of the environment and the person itself are taken into account, as well as interaction effects. “Giftedness” is determined by the status of the product of actions, and a developmental perspective is implemented while differentiating somewhat as “stages of excellence” when calling the actions talented, gifted, or excellent.

Research on the Actiotope Model of Giftedness

In a convincing manner the previous contributions have shown the practical usefulness of the Actiotope Model of Giftedness concerning the needs in all areas practitioners are engaged with “giftedness”: research, promotion, and counselling.

Heidrun Stoeger introduced a research project about the role of fine motor skills in the development of scholastic success among fourth grade students. It was demonstrated that in the group of scholastic underachievers fine motor skill abilities, but not their general ability to concentrate, was less disposable, but there were interactions of these functions, that mean the higher the fine motor deficit the higher the errors made in the concentration ability test. Analysing the data in another way the same results were found: Errors made in concentration tests predict the achievement status only in interaction with fine motor skill deficits. Moreover, underachievers were overrepresented in the group of pupils with fine motor skill deficits combined with high error rate in the concentration test.

Interestingly this topic has not found attention in research literature on underachievement before. I think one reason is that in traditional research the main focus is on bivariate relations of predictors and criteria or on mean differences in testscores. This approach often overlooks that usually there is more than one reason explaining a given behaviour, and that these interact. Using the Actiotope Model of Giftedness asking for the reasons of a given behaviour prevents from such neglect. The model suggests that actions consist of many sub-actions which are carried out simultaneously. And vice versa – that was what Heidrun showed – difficulties in controlling one of these actions also disturb parallel actions.

The main focus of Albert Zieglers contribution was the participation rate of girls in achievement courses and university programs in the fields of mathematics, techniques, engineering, and natural sciences.

It is a well known mysterium that girls are dramatically underrepresented in this field, and it is also well known that the reason is *not* a general lack of abilities in this gender group caused by genetics. The Actiotope Model of Giftedness once again provides a helpful theoretical background that brings light to this question: The "environment" ring contains not only "peers" and "family" as common variables concerning environmental influence in development of an individual. The Actiotope model differentiates between *persons*, *objects*, *setting*, and *social influence*, *independent* of the group or the special environmental context they belong to. Moreover, an interaction of environment and the actions is proposed – and actions are nothing less than behaviour in a given talent domain.

From considering the Actiotope model from this point of view it is just a small step to the idea, that persons play a *prominent* role in fostering the excellence of actions. I think this might be one of the ideas Albert Ziegler and his colleagues followed when developing the CyberMentor Project. Albert's contribution today was about the results of a first evaluation of this program. It showed clearly, that under contact with a same-sex role model girls expand successfully their action repertoires.

In the third contribution, Robert Grassinger showed the usefulness of the Actiotope model for the counselling of gifted. The ENTER-Triple L Model formalizes the counselling process in three stadiums of the development of abilities and on the basis of a systemic approach: The screening phase helps identify possible talent domains even if not having been detected before. The diagnostic phase clarifies the given problem status, and the counselling/evaluation phase supports the problem-solving and activating of resources. The process is terminated by the evaluation of the counselling actions.

On my view the ENTER-Triple L Model is characterized by two ideas: First of all it does not simply focus on the training in a given talent domain or the correction of dysfunctional behaviour. It includes all areas of the development of the individual with respect to the given stage of talent development. Secondly the explicitly included evaluation process assures long-term effectiveness of the consulting process. More than 100 successful counselling cases in the last two years accentuate this.

Conclusion

Allow me to formulate my conclusion of the "Research on the Actiotope Model of Giftedness" in three theses:

1. The Actiotope Model of Giftedness is a prime example for a "conceptual reboot" in the field of giftedness.
2. The Actiotope Model of Giftedness provides a helpful theoretical background for research, and promotion, as well as counselling of the gifted.
3. Further research on giftedness should take into account such a systemic view and investigate this interesting behaviour regarding its *structural* relations.

Thank You for Your Attention!

References

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